

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0999
INFO AMCONSUL BREMEN
AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF
AMCONSUL FRANKFURT
AMCONSUL HAMBURG
AMCONSUL MUNICH
AMCONSUL STUTTGART
USMISSION USBERLIN
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE
CINC USAREUR HEIDELBERG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BONN 14606

USCINCEUR AND CINC USAREUR FOR POLADS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, GW
SUBJECT: THE FALL OF HANS FILBINGER

REF: (A) STUTTGART 1503 DTG 071735Z AUG 78
(B) STUTTGART 1512 DTG 091000Z AUG 78

BEGIN SUMMARY. THE RESIGNATION OF HANS FILBINGER MARKS
THE END OF AN ERA FOR HIS PARTY IN HIS LAND. THE
AFTERMATH OF THIS AFFAIR WILL AFFECT NATIONAL POLITICS
IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC FOR SOME TIME. END SUMMARY.

1. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HANS FILBINGER'S LONG-DELAYED
DECISION TO STEP DOWN AS MINISTER-PRESIDENT OF BADEN-
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WUERTTEMBERG OFFER AT BEST A MIXED BLESSING FOR HIS
PARTY. AS THE REVELATIONS AND RETRACTIONS MOUNTED, IT
HAD BECOME ALL TOO PLAIN THAT FILBINGER HAD TO GO,
FOR THE SAKE OF THE CDU POSITION IN BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG
AND OF CDU FORTUNFORTUNES IN IMPORTANT STATE (LAND)
ELECTIONS THAT LIE AHEAD. INDICATIVE OF THE IMPORTANCE
WHICH THE PARTY ATTACHED TO THIS PROBLEM, CDU NATIONAL

CHAIRMAN HELMUT KOHL AND THE CDU BUNDESTAG CAUCUS FROM BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG KEPT IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH STUTTGART DEVELOPMENTS IN THE DAYS LEADING UP TO FILBINGER'S ANNOUNCEMENT ON AUGUST 7.

2. THOUGH IT WAS THE CDU WHICH - FINALLY - PERSUADED FILBINGER THAT HE HAD TO RESIGN AS MINISTER-PRESIDENT, MANY VOICES IN THE UNION NOW CLAIM THAT A LEFTIST SMEAR CAMPAIGN BROUGHT HIM DOWN.

A. TO HIS CREDIT, KOHL HAS NOT PUBLICLY TAKEN THIS LINE. HOWEVER, CDU SECRETARY GENERAL HEINER GEISLER HAS TWICE CLAIMED THAT THE CAMPAIGN TO DEPOSE FILBINGER WAS IN FACT AN EFFORT TO DIVERT PUBLIC ATTENTION FROM THE REAL MENACE IN THE FRG: I.E., LEFT-WING RADICALISM. RATHER GRATUITOUSLY, GEISLER ADDED THAT THE CDU WOULD NOT DIG INTO THE PAST OF VULNERABLE SPD FIGURES - HE MEANT WEHNER AND BRANDT - IN ORDER TO AVOID A RETURN TO THE SHODDY POLITICS OF THE WEIMAR ERA.

B. LESS BURDENED BY SUCH SCRUPLES, THE CSU HAS INVEIGHED MIGHTILY AGAINST A LEFT-WING SMEAR CAMPAIGN. IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS, THE PARTY'S BAYERNKURIER HAS ALSO TRIED TO TAR HELMUT SCHMIDT WITH A NAZI BRUSH, ON THE BASIS OF HIS ATTENDANCE AT THE SHOW TRIAL AGAINST THE JULY 20, 1944 CONSPIRATORS.
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3. CSU REGRET OVER FILBINGER'S RESIGNATION IS LARGELY GENUINE. STRAUSS HAS LOST AN IMPORTANT ALLY IN THE CDU CAMP, AND HE REALIZES THAT UNION POLITICS SOUTH OF THE MAIN MAY NOT BE QUITE SO CLOSE IN THE FUTURE. BY TEMPERAMENT AND BY TRADITION, FILBINGER AND STRAUSS WERE OFTEN NATURAL ALLIES; THEIR LARGEST MAJOR DIFFERENCE IN RECENT YEARS CONCERNED STRAUSS'S CAMPAIGN TO FORM A FOURTH PARTY. FILBINGER SPOKE FOR A SIGNIFICANT GROUP FAVORING LAW-AND-ORDER MEASURES. HE ALSO ADOPTED THE SLOGAN (COINED BY STRAUSS), "FREEDOM INSTEAD OF SOCIALISM," WITH WHICH HE LED THE BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG CDU TO AN OVERWHELMING VICTORY IN THE 1976 ELECTION.

4. THE CDU EXPECTS SOME POLITICAL FLAK OVER ITS DECISION TO ALLOW FILBINGER, DESPITE HIS RESIGNATION AS MINISTER-PRESIDENT, TO KEEP IMPORTANT PARTY OFFICES. FILBINGER IS STILL LANDTAG DEPUTY, CHAIRMAN OF THE BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG CDU, AND DEPUTY NATIONAL CHAIRMAN OF THE CDU.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 BONN 14606

A. THE DECISION TO LET FILBINGER KEEP THESE POSTS GIVES MANY TARGETS OF OPPORTUNITY TO THE SPD, WHOSE MEMBERS HAVE LONG REGARDED FILBINGER AS THE ARCHETYPAL POLITICAL AND/OR IDEOLOGICAL FOE. THE SPD HAS ALREADY BEGUN TO DRAW FIRE ON FILBINGER'S REMAINING POSTS, WHILE REJECTING ALL CDU EFFORTS TO DRAW A PARALLEL TO THE 1974 RESIGNATION OF WILLY BRANDT, WHO LEFT AS CHANCELLOR BUT STAYED ON AS SPD NATIONAL CHAIRMAN.

B. IN ALL LIKELIHOOD, FILBINGER'S ROLE IN NATIONAL CDU POLITICS WILL CONTINUE TO DECLINE. HIS POSITION OUTSIDE BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG HAS SLIPPED IN RECENT YEARS. HE BARELY WON ELECTION TO THE POST OF CDU DEPUTY NATIONAL
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CHAIRMAN IN 1977, AND HE MAY NOT SEEK REELECTION AT THE NEXT CDU CONVENTION IN OCTOBER 1978.

5. WHOEVER SUCCEEDS FILBINGER AS MINISTER-PRESIDENT, POLITICS IN BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG WILL NOT BE THE SAME. THE END OF HIS 13-YEAR TENURE WILL SEE THE REINS OF POWER PASS TO A YOUNGER GENERATION, REFLECTING A GENERAL MOVEMENT UNDERWAY IN FRG POLITICS.

6. MORE THAN CHRONOLOGY SEPARATES FILBINGER (65) FROM LOTHAR SPAETH (40), MANFRED ROMMEL (49), AND THE CDU'S JUNGE UNION. THE HISTORICAL DIVIDE WHICH SEPARATES THE GENERATIONS IS ONE REASON, BUT BY NO MEANS THE ONLY ONE, THAT YOUNGER CDU MEMBERS IN BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG, ESPECIALLY THE JUNGE UNION, CRITICIZED SO STRONGLY FILBINGER'S PAST RECORD AND HIS INEFFECTUAL EFFORTS TO EXPLAIN IT. THIS NEW GENERATION - THE MATTHIAS WISSMANS, THE GERD LANGGUTHS - WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN THE PROCESS WHICH FORCED FILBINGER TO STEP DOWN. AS THIS GENERATION MATURES POLITICALLY, IT IS SHOWING AN ASSERTIVENESS AND A GROWING DISINCLINATION TO TOLERATE UNPLEASANT RELICS FROM THE PRE-1945 ERA. WE MAY WELL SEE FURTHER EVIDENCE OF THIS ASSERTIVENESS IN OTHER LAENDER IN THE FUTURE.

7. ONE CAN ONLY SPECULATE AS TO WHY A POLITICAN AS SAVVY AND EXPERIENCED AS FILBINGER WOULD COMMIT SO MANY MISTAKES WHICH, IN THE END, COST HIM HIS JOB AND MUCH OF HIS REPUTATION. HISTORICAL PARALLELS COME TO MIND, AND THERE IS EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE WHICH ARGUES THAT OVERWHELMING SUCCESS AT THE POLLS MAKES IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR ELECTED LEADERS TO STAY IN TOUCH WITH POLITICAL REALITY. IN HIS RESIGNATION ANNOUNCEMENT, FILBINGER
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SHOWED GREAT BITTERNESS AND AN EXQUISITE SENSE OF HAVING BEEN WRONGED. THEREIN LIES HIS PERSONAL TRAGEDY, IF THERE IS ONE, AND HIS PERSONAL LIMITATIONS, WHICH - DESPITE HIS MERITS - ARE UNDENIABLE.

8. THE INDEPENDENT NATIONAL DAILY, DIE WELT, CAUGHT THE ESSENCE OF FILBINGER'S DILEMMA IN AN AUGUST 8 EDITORIAL. THE PAPER WROTE THAT FILBINGER HAD BEEN NEITHER A HANGING JUDGE NOR A RESISTANCE FIGHTER. "HE WAS A FELLOW TRAVELLER, LIKE MILLIONS OF OTHERS WHO SERVED THE REGIME AND OCCASIONALLY OPPOSED IT. THE OLDER GENERATION UNDERSTANDS THIS DICHOTOMY, BECAUSE IT TRIED TO SAVE ITSELF IN SIMILAR WAYS DURING THE 4491 DAYS OF THE 1000-YEAR REICH. SELF-DECEPTION IN THOSE DAYS WAS

PART OF THE SURVIVAL STRATEGY OF COUNTLESS THOUSANDS.
THERE WERE MANY FILBINGERS."
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